

# COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER

*SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING (SEL)  
& BUILDING EMOTIONAL VOCABULARY*



## DESCRIBING OUR EMOTIONS

*by Brian Schank, Senior SEL Program Specialist*

When was the last time you said, “I feel luminous today” or heard a colleague say, “my students seem despondent this week?” Probably not recently, as we do not use many words to describe our emotions - on average less than 20 words a day. There are 3,000 words in the English language to describe emotions, so we are barely cracking the surface as adults. This is important because children do not have the words to describe their emotions beyond being happy, sad, or mad. These emotions are happening to our children, and they feel the physical signals that accompany them, but they need to be taught to notice, interpret, and name emotions with accuracy. When children are able to name their emotions and do it with an expanded vocabulary, they can understand what is happening inside both emotionally and physically. Emotional literacy is taught, and it must be fostered, nurtured, and developed over time with practice. As a first step, we say at Frameworks, “emotions are not good or bad, they are comfortable or uncomfortable.” Emotional literacy starts with this premise, so children understand we all experience emotions, and all emotions are okay. In this issue, we will explore building emotional vocabulary and provide tips, tools, and resources to help to expand children’s emotional literacy, help them understand what they are feeling, and increase their ability to interpret their naturally occurring emotions.

Labeling Emotions is key. If you can name it, you can tame it.



### EARLY LEARNING

It’s important to help our little ones develop a wide range of vocabulary for their emotions so they can express how they feel emotionally rather than show how they feel physically. As a leading role model in a young child’s life, you can talk about your feelings and express your emotions in healthy ways. You can use picture books to pair emotions with facial expressions to help them describe exactly how they feel, and try replacing some common feeling words with new ones to help grow your little one’s vocabulary.

### ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

School-aged children can express themselves and understand their emotions on a deeper level. At this age, we want to continue to expose them to new emotional vocabulary, but now put a stronger emphasis on engaging in meaningful conversations with them about their feelings. Asking them purposeful questions daily, like “How did that make you feel and why?” and “How are you feeling today?” will give them permission to name their emotions and continue building their emotional vocabulary.

### MIDDLE SCHOOL

During young adolescent years, middle schoolers are developing their self-identity and identity among their peers. According to Erickson’s Stages of Development, at this age they are experiencing a series of mixed feelings about who they are and where they fit into society. It is crucial to continue to help build their emotional vocabulary, so they can express themselves and release their emotions. To encourage self-expression, you can introduce a new emotional vocabulary word during dinner and look it up together.

### HIGH SCHOOL

High schoolers are a bit more seasoned in communicating and expressing themselves, but they can also benefit from building their emotional vocabulary. When high schoolers can name their emotion, they are able to claim and tame their emotion. This will help them be reflective and encourage them to think more deeply about what emotion they are feeling and why they feel the way they do. Providing a safe space for them to share will be instrumental to their growth of emotional vocabulary.

# COPING SKILLS & ACTIVITIES



## ACTIVITIES TO INCREASE EMOTIONAL VOCABULARY

by *Eddie Underwood*  
SEL Program Specialist

Your emotional vocabulary is the collection of words that you use to express your feelings and reactions to experiences. This process begins in early childhood, even before you have learned to talk. This expanded vocabulary helps us to be able to express our emotions and understand the feelings of others. Below are some activities to help build your emotional vocabulary. These activities will work for children and adults, so give them a try.

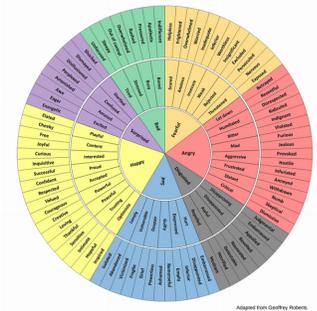
- 1. Make a Big List of Feelings:** Grab a big piece of paper and a marker and sit down with your child to brainstorm all the feelings you can think of. Your list may include emotions your child doesn't recognize, but that's okay. Make the face that goes with the feeling and explain a situation in which that feeling may come up.
- 2. Play Emotional Charades:** This is a fun game to play with your child. One of you picks an emotion to convey to the other, using either your whole body or just your face. If your child is having trouble making sense of the faces, give them a mirror, ask them to make the same face as you and look in the mirror. They may be able to see the feeling on their face better than on yours.
- 3. Make a Feelings Collage:** Give your child some paper, scissors, glue, and old magazines. You can either provide a list of feelings that they need to find faces to match or have them make a collage of faces and tell you what the emotions are. When they're done, label the emotions and hang the collage somewhere where it can be easily accessed.
- 4. Keep a Feelings Journal:** A feelings journal is a good way for your child to keep track of their emotions and the situations in which they feel them.

# EMOTIONAL VOCABULARY AND SEL

by *Jordan Sims*  
Community Programs Specialist

In this section, we will explore the vital role emotional vocabulary plays in each of the five core competencies of SEL.

- **Self-Awareness** is all about understanding ourselves, and we cannot begin to understand ourselves if we do not have the words for our feelings. When we have more words to describe how we feel we are better able to link our feelings to our thoughts, values, and behaviors, empowering us to be our best selves.
- **Self-Management** skills are enhanced by a robust emotional vocabulary because it allows us to be more descriptive about our feeling states and gives us more information for managing them. For example, if we can move from the basic emotion word of "sad" to a more descriptive word like "lonely," we can select targeted tools for self-management like calling a friend or spending time with loved ones.
- **Social Awareness** is our ability to understand and empathize with others, but how can we do that if we do not have the right words for how they feel? Building our emotional vocabulary expands our ability to take the perspective of another person, understand our emotional impact on the people around us, and have genuine empathy for others.
- **Relationship Skills** develop through connection to others, which is an inherently emotional act. Relationships elicit powerful emotions in us, and we need a powerful emotional vocabulary to fully comprehend and express these emotions. This helps us have healthy relationships where we can communicate, collaborate, and problem-solve effectively.
- **Responsible Decision-Making** may seem like a process void of emotions, but that is far from true. Having an extensive emotional vocabulary allows us to analyze and reflect on our choices in a mature manner so we can ultimately make the most responsible decision. Do I feel proud about this decision? Will others be ashamed of my actions? How do I feel about this choice?



Adapted from Geoffrey Rowley

## RESOURCES AND READINGS

by *Lauren Reneau*  
SEL Assistant

In this section we will offer tools and resources to help expand emotional literacy and build emotional vocabulary. The first tool is the emotional vocabulary wheel, a great resource to use with your children when they are needing help identifying and expressing what they are feeling. Start with the innermost ring, which lists more common emotion words such as happy, angry, or sad. Follow your word to the outer sections, which offer more descriptive language to target your specific feeling. This is great to do with children who experience a wide variety of emotions but are still learning what they mean and how to describe what they are feeling. Frameworks' emotions wheel and other resources are available [here](#).

In addition, [this blog post](#) from Lemon Lime Adventures outlines various fun activities to help kids recognize emotions, from free printable board games, coloring pages, activities, and books that outline lessons about emotions. They also have monthly themed printable calming kits for kids and additional resources for self-regulation.

To purchase resources for home, classroom, or office use visit [www.myframeworks.org](http://www.myframeworks.org)



## UPCOMING EVENTS

Tampa Oyster Fest 2021

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